



GREENWICH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Superintendent of Schools

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September 3, 2013

Dear Greenwich Public School Families:

The first week of school was one of great highs and a tragic low. While we opened the schools smoothly and with notable spirit, our hearts were broken when we learned that Greenwich High School sophomore Bartłomiej (Bart) Palosz took his own life last Tuesday.

I am sending this message to every family today to offer in the strongest terms possible my professional and personal commitment to do everything I can to ensure the health, safety and well-being of all our students. Bart Palosz made a life-ending decision one week ago. I will do all I can as superintendent to prevent any other student from making such a tragic decision.

The Greenwich Police Department (GPD) is conducting an ongoing investigation that includes and reaches beyond the boundaries of the Greenwich Public Schools. We are cooperating fully with the GPD investigation. Please understand that we are bound by laws that are designed to protect student and family rights and are not able to discuss specifics while these investigations are underway.

Reaching well beyond this particular incident, I am pushing ahead on four major efforts to make sure that all of our students are safe and secure in our schools, and that any mistreatment by fellow students or adults will not be tolerated.

1. We are reviewing all policies, procedures and practices regarding bullying to make sure they align with Connecticut State Law and with accepted best practices nationally. Equally important, we are examining how to make sure that we uphold these policies, procedures and policies so that any reported incident is investigated and the appropriate consequences occur for all involved.
2. We will examine how the Greenwich Public Schools, in coordination with parents and families, can effectively access and monitor social media sites where students may evidence dangerous and life-threatening behavior. The experience in other educational institutions is that the social media challenge requires the active involvement of parents and families, often more so than educators.
3. Even when adults are aware and involved, student peers often have access to information that can bring new perspectives to a given situation. To that end, we will support the establishment of a coordinated set of student groups to advocate for the respectful and peaceful treatment of all students. Students have taken the lead on establishing one such group at Greenwich High School. We will explore the merits of establishing similar groups at each of the middle schools. Lastly, we will work with First Selectman Peter Tesei to establish the "First Selectman's Youth Council," which would draw students from public, independent and Catholic schools in Greenwich to promote healthy life choices, including respectful treatment of peers.

4. We will reach out to PTA Council leadership and other agencies in Greenwich to support a series of parent sessions on how to help schools and families promote respectful and peaceful behavior among students.

As we move through the year, I will evaluate the merits of each of these efforts. We will modify the plans and work as necessary.

Attached to this letter is a summary of the measures already in place to create and maintain a safe school climate. It is important to note that this summary is not an exhaustive list.

I launched this year with the theme of "Inspiration and Trust." After the first week of school, it is now clear that examples of inspiration and trust will be different than I imagined. We must inspire one another to come together as a community to support our children. Trust must be fostered--a trust that allows all adults and students to know that they will be treated with respect and dignity. When this year closes, I am confident that we will share many inspiring stories of how students and adults together fostered the trust necessary to ensure the well-being of all our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "W. McKersie".

William S. McKersie, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Greenwich Public Schools

/Attachment

SUMMARY OF PROACTIVE AND RESPONSIVE MEASURES TO CREATE A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Proactive Measures for a Safe School Environment

The safety and well-being of our students are the highest priority of the Greenwich Public Schools. To that end, we highlight the following organizational structures, programs, policies and procedures that have been established to advance a safe school climate. This list is not exhaustive.

Safe School Climate Committees in every school. School Safe School Climate Coordinator sits on District SSC Committee. Responsible for establishing and implementing district norms: Be Here, Be Safe, Be Honest, Care for Self and Others, Let Go and Move On. Coordinates training for school staff in implementing school norms and creating a safe school environment.

Mental Health Staff. School Psychologist, Social Workers, and/or Guidance Counselors in every building.

New GHS Position: The Dean of Student Life position was established to develop proactive approaches to creating a positive and safe school environment.

GHS School Resource Officer – a Greenwich Police Officer specifically trained to work in schools as a proactive measure to (as per the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) web site) “provide safe learning environments in our nation’s schools, provide valuable resources to school staff, foster a positive relationship with our nation’s youth, and develop strategies to resolve problems affecting our youth with the goal of protecting every child so they can reach their fullest potential.”

Names Day at GHS – per GHS web site: “Names Can Really Hurt Us is a day-long workshop for the freshman class, co-sponsored by **GHS** and the Connecticut chapter of the **Anti-Defamation League**. During the workshop students are invited to explore concepts such as stereotyping, prejudice, and name-calling and to relate them to their own experiences. “

TeenTalk at Western Middle School – Kids in Crisis offers *TeenTalk* - places trained counselors in area middle and high schools to provide a confidential support system for students dealing with the wide range of issues that arise in adolescence. (*TeenTalk* is a Kids In Crisis operated program. Discussions to expand the program into the other middle schools are underway.)

Reported or Observed Acts of Bullying

There is a zero-tolerance for bullying in our schools.

Policy E-002/Procedure E-002.2 outlines the practices and protocols employed by District personnel to address reported or observed acts of bullying.

If bullying is reported, observed, or suspected, a formal investigation is conducted, and if confirmed to be an act of bullying as defined by state statute, disciplinary action is taken if deemed appropriate, which may include suspension or expulsion from school. In addition, support may be provided by mental health care personnel.

Students At Risk of Harming Themselves or Others

A risk assessment is conducted by qualified mental health staff, trained to recognize and respond to any concerns that a student may be at risk of hurting him/herself or others. Parents are notified when a risk assessment is conducted.

If the assessment concludes that the student is at risk, parents are contacted immediately and the student is referred to outside supports and providers.